

Family Connections

EDITED BY JUSTUN MILLER

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By Justun Miller

This month's edition of the Family Connections Newsletter is focusing on the strengths of families, and how we can improve and maintain that strength. All too often, as the family members and loved ones of someone who is unwell, we are left feeling powerless and/or are focused on what we are not able to do.

In this issue we will be sharing techniques, approaches, and perspectives that will support you in recognizing the strengths that you and your family possess and possibly even identifying those that you were unaware of.



Sometimes providing the appropriate care for your loved one requires you to acknowledge that you are not able and/or capable of providing them with what they need.

Please remember that if your loved one is at risk to themselves or others, the best resources are your local Emergency Department, and 911. For non-emergencies please contact the Access and Assessment Center (AAC).

AAC Contact Information

Hours: 7 days/week; 24 hours/day; 365 days/year
 Phone: 604-875- 8289
 Address: 711 West 12th Ave

Your Family Support and Involvement Team

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Family Strengths Research

By Isabella Mori

Much of the research on families focuses on why families fail. If researchers study only family problems, that's what they're likely going to find: problems. It stands to reason, then, to study family strengths. In the article "Strong Families," John DeFrain lays out an overview of a project to discover the strength of Australian families of all walks of life and from many cultures. DeFrain notes two models of strong families, the *Family Map* by David H. Olson, and the *Family Model*, developed by DeFrain himself, together with colleagues. Some characteristics of strong families they found were:

Cohesion / Time Together: One thing that contributes to a strong family is "hanging out" together and doing things together that everyone enjoys.

Flexibility: "the ability to change with changing life circumstances."

Communication: which facilitates feelings of closeness and helps solve problems together. So-called "positive communication" is discussed particularly in the Family Model – sharing feelings, giving compliments, agreeing to disagree, etc.

Commitment: e.g. trust, honesty, sharing

Appreciation and affection: This includes caring for each other, respect for individuality and humour: "Strong families like to laugh."

Ability to Cope With Stress and Crisis: "Among the strategies strong families use for weathering crises is pulling together ... each person, even a very young child, has a part to play ... strong families know how to reframe the crisis in a more positive, manageable light."

Spiritual Wellbeing: Families used a wide array of words and expressions to describe this hard-to-pin-down but nevertheless very present concept. Hope, peace, optimism, God, were some of the words. 'I express my beliefs by working ... to make the world a better place,' said one interviewee.

How can all of this research be translated into everyday life? Stephen Toepfer from Kent State University combined this research and what is known about gratitude to start the "Letters of Gratitude" project. Participants write letters to family members, which can help bring out so-far unacknowledged appreciation that they may have for family, and foster and strengthen connections with them. Said one participant: "I fight feelings of depression and this assignment helped me appreciate my family, especially my mother, who have always been there for me."

Sources

Steven M. Toepfer: Strengthening Family Connections with Letters of Gratitude in the Family Science Classroom. *Family Science Review*, Volume 20, 2015 [http://www.familyscienceassociation.org/sites/default/files/7%20%20Toepfer%202015%20%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.familyscienceassociation.org/sites/default/files/7%20%20Toepfer%202015%20%20(1).pdf)

John DeFrain: Strong Families. *Family Matters* No. 53, Winter 1999, <https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/fm53jdf.pdf>

Educating ourselves in regards to what family strengths are is important. But as Isabella eluded to in her article, we need to be able to implement them in our daily lives in order to be able experience their benefits.

One way that we can start to foster our strengths is to acknowledge our rights as family members/loved ones, and as people. The caregivers bill of rights is one way that we can provide ourselves with a reminder of the importance of taking care of ourselves, and how neglecting ourselves will only contribute to us not being as effective at supporting our loved ones.

A Caregiver's Bill of Rights

By Jo Horne (http://www.caregiver.com/articles/caregiver/caregiver_bill_of_rights.htm)

I have the right:

1. To take care of myself. This is not an act of selfishness. It will give me the capability of taking better care of my loved one.
2. To seek help from others even though my loved ones may object. I recognize the limits of my own endurance and strength.
3. To maintain facets of my own life that do not include the person I care for, just as I would if he or she were healthy. I know that I do everything that I reasonably can for this person, and I have the right to do some things just for myself.
4. To get angry, be depressed, and express other difficult feelings occasionally.
5. To reject any attempts by my loved one (either conscious or unconscious) to manipulate me through guilt, and/or depression.
6. To receive consideration, affection, forgiveness, and acceptance for what I do, from my loved ones, for as long as I offer these qualities in return
7. To take pride in what I am accomplishing and to applaud the courage it has sometimes taken to meet the needs of my loved one.
8. To protect my individuality and my right to make a life for myself that will sustain me in the time when my loved one no longer needs my full-time help.
9. To expect and demand that as new strides are made in finding resources to aid physically and mentally impaired persons in our country, similar strides will be made towards aiding and supporting caregivers.



As mentioned in point 9 of the Caregiver’s Bill of Rights, you have the right to “expect and demand that as new strides are made in finding resources to aid physically and mentally impaired persons in our country, similar strides will be made towards aiding and supporting caregivers.”

Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) has been, and continues to work hard towards improving supports for families\loved ones and involving them as a part of the care team. VCH has a Family Plan which is overseen by the Family Advisory Committee (FAC). The FAC has made fantastic progress in implementing elements of the family plan into practice. As a result of their hard work new staff are provided with training on how to work with families. VCH is also the only health authority with a family involvement policy which you can find: [HERE \(http://www.mdabc.net/sites/default/files/pdf/Family%20Involvement%20Policy%20-%20January%202014.pdf\)](http://www.mdabc.net/sites/default/files/pdf/Family%20Involvement%20Policy%20-%20January%202014.pdf). Additionally, the FAC provides an Annual Family Conference. This year was the FAC’s 11th annual conference and it was packed with family members/loved ones, professionals, informative speakers, and resource tables.

Do not worry if you were unable to attend the 11th Annual Family Conference this year, as I have provided a link to all of the PowerPoints from the presenters and their video recorded presentations below.

One of the presentations given at the conference was on the new and exciting Access and Assessment Center (AAC). Last month’s Family Connections Newsletter included a list of the exhibitors that were at the conference, along with links to their websites and contact information so feel free to go to the Spotlight on mental health website [HERE \(http://www.spotlightonmentalhealth.com/family-involvement-newsletter/\)](http://www.spotlightonmentalhealth.com/family-involvement-newsletter/) and see this and other archived newsletters.

[HERE](http://www.bcss.org/resources/topics-by-type/downloads/2016/06/2016-family-conference/) is the link for the conference (<http://www.bcss.org/resources/topics-by-type/downloads/2016/06/2016-family-conference/>)



The Family Connections Support Group

The Family Support and Involvement Team has a support group for family and friends of individuals with mental illness and/or substance use concerns.

The group is being held at the CIBC Centre for Patients and Families at the Jim Pattison Pavilion at VGH and is co-facilitated by a family member. We are very grateful to the CIBC Centre for Patients and Families for partnering with us on this exciting endeavor.

We aim to create a welcoming and supportive space in which family members can share their experiences with each other and feel supported and strengthened in their efforts to help their loved ones.

The group runs twice a month and family members are free to attend on a regular basis or drop in as needed. We hope that having the group on the VGH campus will make it easier for families to attend who are supporting a loved one at the Psychiatric Assessment Unit (PAU), Inpatient Psychiatry or Willow Pavilion, though all family members and supporters are welcome.

DATE: Every first Thursday and third Monday of the month

TIME: 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

PLACE: CIBC Center for Patients and Families at the Jim Pattison Pavilion, Vancouver General Hospital, 899 W. 12th Ave (behind the Information Center)

For questions or more information please contact:

isabella.mori@vch.ca, 604 290-3817 or

becky.hynes@vch.ca , 604 313-1918



“We aim to create a welcoming and supportive space in which family members can share their experiences with each other and feel supported and strengthened”

Taking Care of Myself



If you have ever travelled on an airline, you will have no doubt sat through the safety announcement at the beginning of the flight. Airline stewards inform us that in the unfortunate incidence of an emergency, you are required to pull down the oxygen mask and place it over your face. If you are travelling with children, you are instructed to place the mask on yourself first, and then offer assistance. Why? Because if you don't apply your own oxygen mask first, then you are no use to anyone else around you. In other words, **if you don't look after yourself first, you won't be able to look after others effectively.**

Below, I have listed some self care strategies for you and your family to try.

Reach out.

If you feel lonely or isolated, connect with community support groups, family, friends, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship.

Exercise your brain.

Sometimes the answer to having a lot on your mind is to do something that takes your brain in a completely different direction. Stretch mental boundaries by listening to a lecture on your iPod (https://www.ted.com/playlists/299/the_importance_of_self_care), doing a crossword puzzle, or joining a book club, and checking out the latest best seller. Or take up a new hobby that keeps you active mentally and physically, whether it's gardening or hiking.

Plan ahead.

Grab a calendar and set aside specific days for self care, visiting friends and other activities.

Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. This will help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. Ensure that you ask for help with preparing and cleaning up.

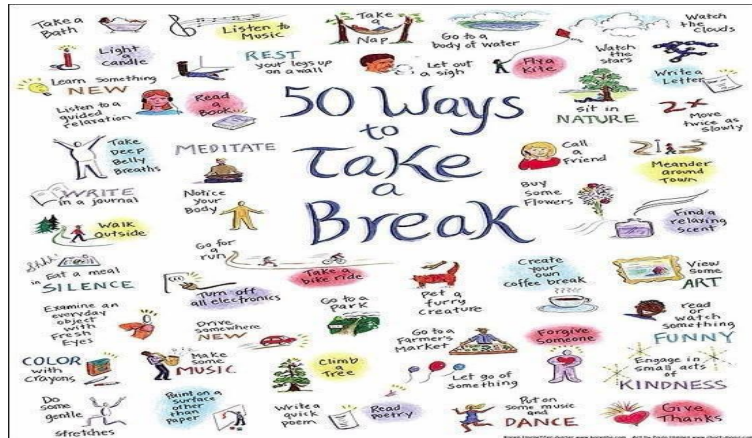
Learn to say no.

Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful, overwhelmed, and burned out. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity.

“If you don't look after yourself first, you won't be able to look after others effectively.”

Do your best to stay rested.

7 to 8 hours of sleep a night are recommended to recharge and lower stress. If you're having trouble falling asleep: Don't drink caffeine past noon, Avoid exercise two hours before bedtime, Make your bedroom a sleep-only zone no TVs, pets, computers, or other distractions. If these tips don't work, talk to your doctor.



Self care.

Take some time for yourself, schedule it into the calendar! It doesn't have to be fancy, try taking a walk, listening to soothing music, getting a massage, attending one of the support groups listed in this newsletter, or reading a book.

Being aware of where you are and what is happening right now -- some call it mindfulness -- can help you relax instead of fretting over what's looming on the horizon. Let go of thoughts about the past or future, and focus on the present moment. How does the air feel against your skin? How does the pavement feel under your feet? If your mind wanders, just bring it back again to focus on the present.

Seek professional help if you need it.

Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable, hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your family doctor, a mental health professional, or walk in clinic doctor, and consider accessing the support groups listed in the back of this newsletter.

Information adapted from:

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20047544?pg=2>

http://www.webmd.com/women/ss/slideshow-revitalize?ecd=wnl_spr_112115&ctr=wnl-spr-112115_nsl-promo-3_desc&mb=oJPh60Eliece3Jrm1DQjmNeHnVev1imbCVpLoaO6RjVA%3d

Here is a tool that can not only provide you with a very structured way of identifying the strengths that you and your family have, but also a means to set specific goals, actions, and time frames.

Discovering our Family Strengths Chart

Strength Area	Very Strong	Some Growth Needed	Much Growth Needed
<p>Love and Appreciation:</p> <p>Caring for each other Friendship Respect for individuality Playfulness Humor</p>			
<p>Time Together</p> <p>Quality time in great quantity Good things take time Enjoying each other's company Simple good times Sharing fun times</p>			
<p>Commitment</p> <p>Trust Honesty Dependability Faithfulness Sharing</p>			
<p>Communication</p> <p>Encouragement Sharing feelings Giving compliments Agreeing to disagree Avoiding blame Being able to compromise</p>			
<p>Adaptability: Coping with change</p> <p>Seeing crises as challenges and opportunities Growing through crises together Openness to change Resilience</p>			
<p>Connection and Well-being</p> <p>Hope Faith/spirituality/purpose/meaning Compassion Shared ethical values Connections to community and family</p>			

Family Goal Setting Worksheet

Strength Area	Our goals	Activities we will do	When
<p>Love and Appreciation:</p> <p>Caring for each other Friendship</p> <p>Respect for individuality</p> <p>Playfulness</p> <p>Humor</p>			
<p>Time Together</p> <p>Quality time in great quantity</p> <p>Good things take time</p> <p>Enjoying each other's company</p> <p>Simple good times</p> <p>Sharing fun times</p>			
<p>Commitment</p> <p>Trust</p> <p>Honesty</p> <p>Dependability</p> <p>Faithfulness</p> <p>Sharing</p>			
<p>Communication</p> <p>Encouragement</p> <p>Sharing feelings</p> <p>Giving compliments</p> <p>Agreeing to disagree</p> <p>Avoiding blame</p> <p>Being able to compromise</p>			
<p>Adaptability: Coping with Change</p> <p>Seeing crises as challenges and opportunities</p> <p>Growing through crises together</p> <p>Openness to change</p> <p>Resilience</p>			
<p>Connection and Well-being</p> <p>Hope</p> <p>Faith/spirituality/purpose/meaning</p> <p>Compassion</p> <p>Shared ethical values</p> <p>Connections to community and family</p>			

Mood Disorders Association of BC (MDABC) – Mutual support groups for families of individuals living with a mood disorder. 2nd and 4th Tuesday each month, 7 - 9 p.m., Mount St. Joseph Hospital, 3080 Prince Edward St, Harvest Room A.
Contact Suemay Black @ 604-251-2179

Raven Song Family Support Group– Support group for families who have a loved one living with mental illness. 2nd Wednesday of each month 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. at Raven Song Community Health Centre, 2450 Ontario Street, Vancouver.
Contact Sally @ Tel: (604)270 7841 ext 2126

SPH Family Support Group- Support for families who have a loved one living with mental illness. Last Thursday of each month, 6-7:30pm. St Paul's Hospital, 1081 Burrard Street, Room 2B-169, 2nd floor, Burrard Building.
To register, call Kaye 604-682-2344 local 68964

VCH Eating Disorder Program (VCHED)– Family Support Group – for friends and family members of individuals living with an eating disorder. 1st Wednesday of each month, 6 – 7:30 p.m., 3rd Floor, 2750 East Hastings, Vancouver.
Contact Hella at 604-675-2531 ext 20689.

Parents Forever – Support group for families of adult children living with addiction. Group meets every 2nd Friday at St. Mary's Kerrisdale, 2490 W 37th Ave., Vancouver. Contact Frances Kenny, 604-524-4230 or fkenny@uniserve.com

Pathways Clubhouse Chinese Family Support Group – Education sessions for Chinese families who have a loved one living with mental illness. 2nd Saturday of each month. 1 – 4:00 p.m., Room 345/50, 7000 Minoru Blvd, Richmond.
Contact Bessie.wang@pathwaysclubhouse.com
or 604-276-8834, ext 12.

GRASP Support Group – GRASP offers peer-led mutual support groups for families or individuals who have had a loved one die as a result of substance abuse or addiction. 2nd Thursday of each month, 7-9 p.m. at Gilmore Community School 50 South Gilmore Ave, Rm 207. Please email graspvancouverarea@gmail.com to register.

SMART, Family and Friends - Support group for family and friends to learn and implement self care, boundary setting, and compassionate communication tools. Every Tuesday 6:30-8:00PM at Three Bridges Addictions 1290 Hornby Street, Rm 310.
Thursday 6:00-7:00PM at Raven Song 2450 Ontario Street, 1st floor.
Call Oona @ 604-714-3480.

Family Connections Support Group (FCSP)—Every first Thursday and third Monday of the month in the CIBC Center for Patients and Families at the Jim Pattison Pavilion, Vancouver General Hospital, 899 W. 12th Ave (behind the Information Center) For questions or more information please contact: isabella.mori@vch.ca, 604 290-3817 or becky.hynes@vch.ca, 604 313-1918

Family Support Groups



June 2016

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 VCHED	2 SMART FCSP	3	4
5	6	7 SMART	8 Raven Song	9 SMART GRASP	10 Parents Forever	11 Pathways
12	13	14 SMART MDABC	15	16 SMART	17	18
19	20 FCSP	21 SMART	22	23 SMART	24 Parents Forever	25
26	27	28 SMART MDABC	29	30 SPH		

NOTES